

Hood Canal Coordinating Council Shellfish Survey Responses

What do you need to be successful in shellfishing endeavors in Hood Canal with respect to:

- Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?
- Land availability/affordability?
- Market access/price?
- Water quality/quantity?
- Community perception/support?
- Other?

John Petrie, Coast Seafoods Company in Quilcene Bay and Beyond

Coast Seafoods Company (“Coast”), in operation since 1946, has been engaged in shellfish farming activities in Hood Canal for decades and is a significant contributor to economic activities in the Hood Canal region. Since 1978, Coast has owned and operated a shellfish hatchery in Quilcene Bay. This is the world’s largest oyster hatchery and produces substantial quantities of mussel and manila clam larvae and seed. In association with its hatchery operation, Coast also operates a shellfish nursery on the tidelands/uplands adjacent to its Quilcene hatchery that is associated with the company’s hatchery facility. Finally, Penn Cove Shellfish, in which Coast has 50% ownership, has existing mussel rafts in Quilcene Bay and has been successfully farming mussels there for over five years.

Shellfish farming is a critical source of jobs in the Hood Canal region. The hatchery, with its 28 employees, is vital to the economic stability of south Jefferson County. Hood Canal communities rely on the family-wage jobs that shellfish hatcheries, nurseries, and farms provide. The associated requirements for support materials—such as utilities, gas and oil, and equipment and supplies—further contribute to the local economy and to the economic success of the Port of Port Townsend.

The economic impact of the shellfish community in the Hood Canal region extends far beyond these local impacts. Hood Canal is of special significance to the entire West Coast shellfish industry because two of the four shellfish hatcheries on the West Coast are located in Jefferson County. These hatcheries, one owned by Coast and one owned by Taylor, supply shellfish seed to the companies’ farms and to many other shellfish growers throughout the region. To give a sense of this impact, Coast Seafoods Company alone grows oysters, mussels, and clams on over 15,000 acres of Pacific Coast tidelands, and provides shellfish larvae and seed to over 100 customers throughout British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, South Africa and South America.

Water Quality/Quantity

Of the criteria referenced in your survey request, water quality/quantity is the clear priority in terms of what is needed to ensure the success of shellfishing endeavors in Hood Canal.

Because shellfish farming activities—including hatchery operations—are dependent on good water quality, fostering and encouraging shellfish farming activities in Hood Canal provides a unique

opportunity to simultaneously protect and enhance both the environmental and economic health of Hood Canal. Department of Health water quality requirements for shellfish harvesting are significantly stronger than those requirements for activities such as swimming or boating. The Department of Health closes shellfish growing areas when water quality drops below established levels. Thus, shellfish farming provides direct evidence of the economic impact of degraded water quality and provides added incentive to keep water quality at the high levels needed to allow for shellfish harvest. The result is good water quality that benefits the ecosystem at large in addition to shellfish farmers. Because the water quality requirements for shellfish farming are so stringent, closure of a shellfish growing area is often the first indication that there is a source of pollution in the vicinity. In our experience, this results in increased agency and community responsiveness and quicker resolution/elimination of that pollution source.

Land availability/affordability

Waterfront residential development in Hood Canal has increased significantly over the past few decades. In some areas this has resulted in increased use conflicts between shellfish farming and residential/recreational uses, and degradation in water quality. This trend has reduced the areas where shellfish farming activities can locate, and has resulted in closures of some areas previously used for shellfish farming. Identifying areas suitable for shellfish farming activities and then protecting them from conflicting uses will help to ensure the continued success of shellfishing endeavors in Hood Canal.

Community Perception/Support

Shellfish farming activities also provide an opportunity to educate members of the community about water quality issues. Coast and other shellfish farmers regularly give tours of their farms and facilities to members of the community, regulators, and legislators. These tours include educating attendees about water quality issues and alerting them to the fact that food is being produced in their communities and in the water. Oftentimes this leads to increased individual and community stewardship over that water body.

Sustainability

The long term economic and environmental health of Hood Canal will ultimately only be achieved if the region promotes activities and endeavors that are both economically and environmentally sustainable. Shellfish farming has already proven itself to be both. Shellfish farming provides valuable ecosystem services, including nitrogen removal and sequestration, turbidity reduction and water quality improvement through filtration, and three-dimensional habitat.

Farmed shellfish are a sustainable, domestic food source. Farmed oysters, mussels, and clams have earned the highest rating from Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program and are widely recognized as sustainable sushi choices.¹ Over 80% of the seafood consumed in the United States is imported from other countries.² With the vertical integration of shellfish farming—from hatcheries to

¹ http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/SeafoodWatch/web/sfw_factsheet.aspx
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/16/7-sustainable-and-environment_717685.html#s140272
<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/international/2010/04/30/eco.sustainable.sushi.webextra.cnn?iref=allsearch>

² <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-04-246>

harvest—that already exists domestically, and particularly in the Hood Canal region, we have a unique opportunity to foster and protect an existing sustainable activity that fosters both the environmental and economic health of Hood Canal.

Adam James, Hama Hama Company in Lilliwaup, WA

Hood Canal is dynamic biophysically, culturally and socio-economically. The press has done a great job of announcing to the world that the canal is suffering from low dissolved oxygen. Personally, I find the fact that 100% of Hood Canal School students qualify for the assisted lunch program equally as troubling. Unfortunately socio-economic platforms don't get you elected, while 'save the sound' campaigns turn into tremendous political windmills. Hopefully processes like this will work towards synthesizing socio-economic issues into the broader ecosystem management debate.

Now I'm fully aware (and grateful) of the fact that as an industry we've benefited from the "save the sound" campaigns. Ecosystem versus jobs is an old, boring paradigm and one we should move away from. This isn't the 1980s and we need to find ways to align those two causes, not pit them against each other. Maybe if the salmon people trusted the industry to do our best to preserve salmon habitat (and salmon forage fish) they'd give us more leeway in our operations? So far, it is my view that the shellfish industry, more than any other industry has done a great job of capitalizing on, working with, and helping to create healthy environments, not destroying them. That's not to say that we couldn't have done more, and/or that we should slow down the save the sound campaigns.

Here is the problem: "It is not about salmon it is about power." A biologist reviews a permit application for a mussel or geoduck farm. During the public comment period, a question is asked by an NGO "is the mussel line going to affect the migration of an endangered anadromous fish?" The biologist says "I don't know?" The NGO interprets this to mean 'yes' or 'no' depending on their own interests. If that specific NGO has a bone to pick with the shellfish industry they call a lawyer. Because lawyers are involved the regulators get cautious. Because of land use conflicts associated with the development of shorelines more and more people join these NGO's who regard shellfish aquaculture in a negative light. What this means: Business prospects suffer, and the grocers of America import 75% of their seafood.

Ironically, as I sit here gazing out the window of my office in the processing building, I can count 15 commercial salmon seiners in mid-Hood Canal. In addition to these large vessels, (fishing seiners which are motoring in from as far away Alaska and Southern Oregon.) there are literally dozens of smaller tribal fishers. Now, I recognize the importance of protecting habitat for salmon and other fish, and we strive to manage our farm in a minimally impacting way. I also understand the financial relevance of the fishing industry. But it's confusing that, aside from tribal fishers, the State continues to allow the direct capture of salmon (and the associated by-catch) while prohibiting many activities that *might* have an indirect effect on salmon or their prey. Many local people on the Canal get hung up on this inconsistency, which stymies collaboration and breeds mistrust.

It is my view that shellfish farming remains one of the most stable and sustainable sources of living-wage jobs on the Canal. But unfortunately for most growers staying their current size is not a sustainable option: ultimately they will need to grow their business to keep up with a growing family, increased labor costs, and an increasingly competitive global market. (For instance, right now manila clams from China are landing in Manhattan and being sold to our distributors at our cost.) I guess I feel that over the last decade, we (as a regional group) have done a great job focusing our resources towards habitat restoration, increased regulation and scientific research. This was a natural reaction to the cavalier 'manifest destiny' approach to resource management which was espoused by most interest groups (including the State) during early statehood. However at this time, we need to integrate, and learn from our mistakes. And, if we want to eat protein, we need to farm it.

Robin Downey, Discovery Bay Shellfish in Discovery Bay, WA

Balance between regulations, incentives, and stewardship?

The current federal regulatory situation has effectively placed a moratorium on the growth of shellfish farming in all of Washington state. Until the ESA consultation currently being conducted on the Army Corps permits for shellfish farming is completed there will be no new farms and there will be no growth of existing farms. At the State level, currently drafted rules (still in the public review process through Dept of Ecology) would effectively prevent the formation of any new farms, the expansion of existing farms, and could, potentially, result in current farms (many that are multi-generational with tidelands purchased under Bush or Callow Acts in the early days of statehood) being phased out. At the local level (Jefferson County) the newly drafted Shoreline Master Program (still awaiting final approval) requires new Conditional Use Permits for geoduck farming, although there is no scientific basis for this new and costly requirement. The struggle to assure the new SMP was not even more problematic to shellfish farmers in Jefferson County was long and arduous. Hopefully the SMP redraft process currently taking place in Mason County will not be fraught with such controversy.

In other words, the regulatory environment is making it increasingly difficult to be a shellfish farmer in the state of Washington. The difficulty is driven in some cases by shoreline homeowners that do not want to see a working waterfront. In other cases it is being driven by public employees who do not understand shellfish farming and, assuming the worst, take the so-called “precautionary principle” approach, which has been thwarted since its original meaning and intent to be an all-encompassing approach to not allow any activities in the natural environment where there is perceived lack of scientific understanding. Since it is the nature of science to always drive us to the next question, the next research project, it is not possible that we will EVER know EVERYTHING about EVERYTHING, so it is a lose-lose proposition for a shellfish farmer, especially with limited resources to “disprove a negative,” to try to negotiate through a system that is idealistically driven.

At the same time, ironically, shellfish farmers have consistently been the most vocal and active citizens in protection of our bays -- the source of our living. Yet they are treated like the enemy increasingly in regulatory circles due to lack of understanding of the marriage between our dependence on the marine environment and ability to grow shellfish. In fact, shellfish farmers are the poster children for stewardship AND incentive. In a reasonable regulatory environment, one that is based on sound science, we would have the ability to continue farming shellfish, providing jobs and protecting our precious marine environment and the uplands that contribute to marine health.

Land availability/affordability?

See above. Currently there are no new farms or expansions taking place, therefore some growers in Washington have headed to B.C. where their ability to grow their businesses is not so hampered.

Market access/price?

Access is a bit challenging in the Jefferson County/Hood Canal area simply because we are ~ 2 hours away from major markets and the airport. However, prices for shellfish are currently very strong, as the demand is good so economically the extra travel time does “pencil out.”

Water quality/quantity?

See #1 above. Water quality is CRITICAL to shellfish farmers. Without clean water we can't grow (or harvest) our crops. Quantity is a problem insofar as there is the aforementioned "moratorium" on growth.

Community perception/support?

See #1 above again. While some members of the community are very supportive of shellfish farming, recognizing its value historically, culturally and from a great sustainable foods and sustainable jobs perspective, there is a minority of naysayers out there who would rather we were not plying the waters.